

## Major in Comparative American Cultures

### 1. Introduction

The increasing prominence of the idea of culture has corresponded with an increasing sense that the term is a differential one: any single culture can only be understood in terms of its differences from and similarities to other cultures. Thus it has become clear that one cannot properly study, say, African American culture without seeing how it has arisen and defined itself sometimes in terms of other ethnic American cultures and sometimes in terms of the idea of an American culture that defines itself by claiming to transcend ethnicity. The cultural nationalism of the Harlem Renaissance, for example, can no more be understood without reference to the ethnic particularism that also produced the immigration restrictions of the 1920s than the Civil Rights movement of the 50s and early 60s can be understood without reference to the anti-communist universalism of the beginning of the Cold War. The major in Comparative American Cultures thus begins with the notion that studies of individual cultures must already be comparative, and it is designed to make such studies possible by recognizing and emphasizing their comparative nature.

The increasing prominence of the idea of culture has also been accompanied by a heightened sense of the ways in which that idea is not only a useful but a controversial one. It is, in other words, an idea that has its own history and that not only offers certain insights into human behavior but also raises certain problems: How are we to understand the relations between culture as a social entity and race as a biological entity? How are we to adjudicate between what may be understood as the competing claims of a culture and of the individual, or of a culture and the state? What are the epistemological questions raised by the idea of culture as it is articulated, say, in the commitment to cultural pluralism? What difference is made to the idea of art (of literature, say, or painting) when it is conceived as a form of cultural expression?

The major in Comparative American Cultures will offer students the chance to ask and answer questions in both these areas: the chance to study the appearance and sometimes the disappearance of the major cultures of the Americas, and the chance to study the history and theory of culture itself. Linking the particular and the common experiences of American cultures through course offerings drawn from a variety of disciplines and requiring each student to participate in designing a program that will culminate in the writing of a substantial senior thesis, the major will both continue and build upon Hopkins's traditional commitment to interdisciplinary work, to independent study and to research-based pedagogy.

### 2. Core Courses

Because the modern history of the Americas has been marked by waves of immigration from Africa, Asia and Europe, any study of American cultures must take into account not only their relations to each other but also their relations to indigenous American

cultures and to their own cultures of origin. Hence, questions of cultural retention and assimilation will be central to the program, as will be the formation of new cultures. Because the very idea of culture has so crucially been articulated in relation to theories of race and nationality, the history of racial and national identity will also be central to the program. Hence the ontological questions that characteristically accompany any attempt to sort out the relations between personal identity and collective identity and the epistemological problems that characteristically accompany the emphasis on cultural knowledge will play a prominent role in the curriculum. Entry to the major will be through a 100-level course -- Introduction to Comparative American Cultures -- designed to introduce students to these general issues through the study of some particular topic. For the first two years, that topic will be the construction of a distinctly modern form of racial identity and its development into the idea of cultural identity in the United States from 1896 (the year of the Supreme Court decision in Plessy v. Ferguson) to 1924 (the year of the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act).

The major's second core course will be a writing-intensive, 200-level seminar, designed to introduce students to the research opportunities the program makes available and to train them in some of the skills that research will require. Like the introductory lecture, its topic will vary depending on the instructor; for 1996 the topic will be colonization and cultural contact in the Americas during the early modern period (1492-1700).

The major's third core course will be an advanced seminar, ideally (but not necessarily) to be taken in the second semester of the junior year. Its purpose is double: to enable students to reflect upon the materials they have been studying and to enable them to begin formulating a project that will reward the year's worth of effort that the senior thesis will require. Unlike the previous two core courses, this course will be general and methodological in its focus, involving, on the theoretical level, wide reading in a variety of approaches to comparative cultural studies, and, on the practical level, the development -- in consultation with the instructor of the course, with the director of the senior thesis and with librarians in both the humanities and the social sciences -- of a specific research project.

The major's final core requirement is a senior thesis for which three credits will be given in each semester of the senior year. The thesis will be written under the direction of a faculty member and will be read both by the thesis director and by the director of the program.

### 3. Other Requirements

In addition to the three core courses and the senior thesis, the major will require seven courses from no more than four different departments to be selected after consultation with the program director from the following list:

#### Anthropology

070.204	Gender, Race and Science	
070.221	Language, Culture, and Society	Haeri
070.301	Race, Racism and Democracy	Baker
070.319	Ethnicity and Nationalism	Verdery
070.327	Culture of Diaspora	Carter
070.329	Nationalism and US Black Nationalism	Williams
070.351	Politics of Language and Ethnicity	Haeri

#### Classics

040.317	What is a Myth?	Detienne
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#### Economics

180.352	Economics of Discrimination	Carrington
180.380	Population Economics	Sirageldin
180.381	Economic Demography	Sirageldin
English		
060.349	Race & Nation in 19thc. American Literature	Reid-Pharr
060.351	Theories of Afro American Lit & Culture	Reid-Pharr
060.690	Studies in the Classic Hollywood Style	Christensen

#### French

340.335	Cultural Histories of Religion	Detienne, Douehi
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#### Hispanic and Italian Studies

350.323	Latin American Cultural Styles	Gonzales
350.330	Introduction to Latin American Lit & Cult	Gonzales
350.338	Lit and Soc: Visions of Change in Latin Amer	CastroKlaren

#### History

100.110	Introduction/Political Culture in America	Walkowitz
100.124	US Slavery and Freedom, 1776-1876	Johnson
100.215	The Formation of the Afro-Atlantic World	Bennett
100.375	Problems in American Social History	Walters
100.376	History of Race Relations in America	Walters
100.382	France in America (Canada and West Indies)	Forster
100.392	US Masters and Slaves	Johnson



100.429	Cultural Politics of Memory	Brown
100.440	Revolutionary Exp. in Mod. Latin-America	Knight
100.463	The African Diaspora: The Brazilian Exp	RussellWood
100.440	Americas	Knight

#### History of Science, Medicine, and Technology

140.388	Race, Health, and Medicine in the U.S.	Mormon
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#### Humanities Center

300.128	Writing and Reading about Cities	Hertz
300.369	Memory	Macksey
300.370	Trauma, War, and the Holocaust	Leys

#### Near Eastern Studies

130.351	The Emergence of Civilization: A Cross-Cultural Examination	Schwarz
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#### Philosophy

150.112	Philosophic Problems	Barker
150.235	Philosophy of Religion	Barker
150.245	Philosophy of Mind	Wilson
150.252	Theories of Knowledge	Staff

#### Political Science

190.307	Race in Contemporary Perspective	Manzo
190.316	The Nation as Cultural Project	Hemberger
190.344	Anti-Semitism	Ginsberg
190.369	Civil Rights, Black Power, Cold War	Hemberger
190.367	Neighborhood Politics	Crenson
190.383	Urban Society and Politics	Crenson
190.384	Urban Politics and Policy	Crenson

#### Sociology

230.305	Poverty and Welfare Policy	Cherlin
230.311	Gender and Development in the Americas	Fern.-Kelly
230.316	The African-American Family	BellMcDonald
230.318	Contemporary Perspectives in Race Relations	Fern.-Kelly
230.330	Class, Gender, Ethnicity, Contemp. Amer.	Fern.-Kelly
230.364	Sociology of Immigration and Ethnicity	Portes
230.364	Race and Ethnic Relations	Portes
230.386	Intelligence and Society	Gordon

**Writing Seminars**

220.329	Folklore and Folklife	Burke
220.342	New Asian American and Latino Writing	DeLuna
220.340	Contemporary African Amer/Native Amer Lit	Jackson

**DOGEE**

570.412	Social Conflict and the City	Harvey
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Finally, the major will require proficiency (two years) in one language, deemed relevant to the student's program by his or her major advisor.